



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Capital Parks-East
1900 Anacostia Drive, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20020

IN REPLY REFER TO:

A3823 (NCR-NACE)

September 28, 2004

Dear Interested Party:

National Capital Parks-East (NACE) is seeking public input on the management of off-shore waterfowl hunting in the waters of the Potomac River and of Piscataway Creek. Presently NACE manages waterfowl hunting through a Wildlife Management Area agreement with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDDNR). NACE is considering whether to renew the agreement, or to end the agreement and change management. (Please see attached site map for project locations.)

This matter is at a starting point for discussion and analysis. With this letter, we are requesting public involvement with concerned citizens like you. Responses are needed to help determine the extent of analysis so we meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments received help us to develop a proposed action, and/or indicate if mitigation is needed.

Purpose and Need

The mission of the National Park Service (NPS) is to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Following this guidance, NACE manages its lands and resources as integrated natural ecosystems. Present waterfowl hunting, while not taking place on Federal parkland has effects on resources within the park proper. Possible impacts occur to the park viewshed, soundscape, visitor experience and safety, native bird populations and to a federally listed species nesting and breeding ground (Bald eagle).

Piscataway Park and Fort Washington Park are popular sites for outdoor activities, school group education and shoreline boating. Over the years, NACE has received complaints from visitors, local landowners and neighborhood associations about the noise (gunshots) created by hunting, concerns about safety (possible accidental shooting) and the effect of

hunting on their park experience (lack of wildlife for viewing and seeing birds killed while in the park.) The park has also received comments from citizens who consider hunting to be an important recreation activity for users of Piscataway Park and Fort Washington Park.

In 2001, NACE contacted MDDNR and notified them that the park intended to end the existing cooperative agreement within 30 days: this right is provided for both parties under the cooperative agreement. The park's intention was to exercise the right as riparian shore-line owner to exempt their land from off-shore waterfowl hunting, in accordance with current state law.

Due to the controversy this proposed ending of the agreement produced, especially within the hunting community, the park extended the cooperative agreement for a single year (2004-2005).

To address this proposed action, NACE is preparing an Environmental Assessment in accordance with NEPA, and responding to public concerns through an open public process. An Environmental Assessment will be prepared to consider various alternatives to manage water fowl hunting and the associated existing agreement with MDDNR, and to address the concerns of interested parties both for and against continued hunting in the area.

Proposed Action

Presently the park is considering three alternatives:

Alternative 1. No Action. Maintain Existing Agreement. Continue licensed hunting at an agreed upon number of blind sites.

Continue the agreement between the National Park Service and the MDDNR. Under this alternative the status quo would continue. The present agreement allows up to 33 hunters to use the waters off Piscataway and Fort Washington Parks for waterfowl hunting September – January, three days a week (Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday) between the sunrise and sunset. The park would continue to release blind sites for floating duck blinds off Piscataway Park to the MDDNR. Under this alternative, site numbers and locations may be adjusted.

Alternative 2. End Agreement. Manage hunting under State law.

Discontinue the agreement between the National Park Service and the MDDNR. Apply Maryland law providing riparian landowners the right to protect shore line from hunting activity. Under this alternative the park may exercise its discretion as a riparian landowner under state law to manage hunting off its shoreline lands and hunting could be eliminated entirely from the park shoreline.

Alternative 3. End Cooperative Agreement. Open shoreline to hunting.

Under this alternative all blind sites identified by MDDNR will be available for waterfowl hunting. The park would make no attempt to manage waterfowl hunting. The public could, consistent with Maryland state law, purchase the approximately 36 shoreline blind sites along the shoreline off NACE land: from Oxon Cove, Prince George's County to Marshall Hall, Charles County. Under this alternative, waterfowl hunting would probably increase.

We are interested in your comments, suggestions and concerns regarding this proposed change to NACE management of waterfowl hunting. Your input is very important. Please provide your comments within 30 days of receipt of this letter. Comments received, including names, become part of the project record and are available for public review. Send your written comments to: National Capital Parks-East, 1900 Anacostia Drive S.E. Washington, D.C. 20020 Attn: Susan Rudy. You may also provide comments to by email to susan_rudy@nps.gov. For questions regarding this proposal, please contact Susan Rudy, Natural Resource Program Manager at (202) 690-5185.

The responsible official for the final decision will be Terry Carlstrom, Regional Director, National Capital Region.

Thank you for your interest in the management of National Capital Parks-East.

Sincerely,



Gayle Hazelwood
Superintendent